

The Process

The Process was devised as a therapy to free people from their 'compulsions' and to release their latent capacities and potentialities. Its creators were a young architectural student and a young Scotswoman with a powerful personality, who had met on a course run by the pseudo-psychological cult, Scientology. They developed their own theories and began to interest their friends in the new 'therapy' they had devised. The group grew and the Process was soon charging Harley Street fees for their courses. The strange sequel is described by Julian Smithells.

Robert de Grimston and Mary Ann Maclean incorporated some of the ideas of Scientology in the Process, the 'treatment' they had devised after attending one of the courses run by this world-wide pseudo-psychological cult. But the similarities were only superficial and the Process developed along its own distinctive lines. The two movements had in common the use of the Hubbard E Meter, a crude form of lie detector, which was claimed to measure the intensity of thoughts passing through the mind. The meter had been adopted by Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, an engineer and science fiction writer and the founder of Scientology in 1950.

Together de Grimston and Miss Maclean developed their theories and in the summer of 1963 began to interest their friends in their ideas. These friends in turn brought in their friends and the Process was launched. After their marriage in 1964 the de Grimstons set up house in a flat in Wigmore Street, and began to run a 'Communications' course there based

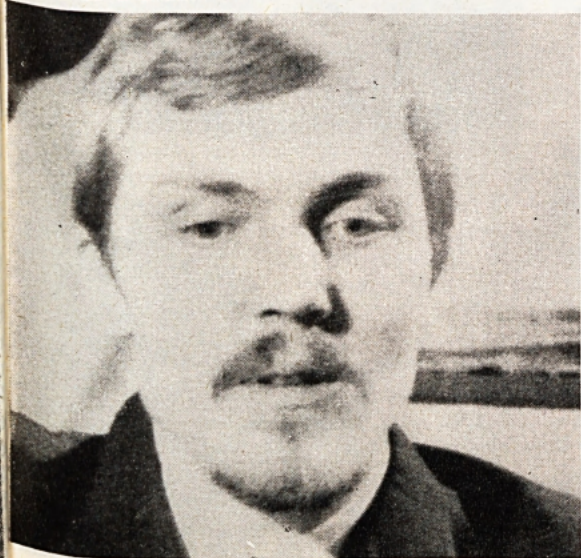
on their ideas. This course was designed to help people, through disciplinary exercises, to communicate more directly and more effectively. Sessions were held on several evenings a week from 7-10 p.m. and the full course of 45 evenings cost £30.

Some time earlier the de Grimstons had developed a more intensive individual 'therapy' consisting of question and answer interviews between a 'therapist' and subject. The fee was originally £3 3s. an hour, but later both larger and smaller sums were accepted according to the means of the 'patient'.

The various courses attracted a growing number of followers, mostly young, upper middle class people from professional families, and in March 1966 a move was made to larger premises at Balfour Place, Mayfair. It is estimated that between 200 and 300 people attended Process courses for long or short periods.

The Process no longer exists as a psychological exercise. Its short life as a 'therapy'—about three years—

Robert de Grimston



Mary Ann de Grimston



came to an end during last summer when the group went to the Bahamas and then on to Mexico. Most of the party returned a few months later in the wake of three minors, members of the group, who had come back from Mexico as a result of action by their anxious parents. The others—between ten and twenty of them—remain at Balfour Place, Mayfair.

To an outsider the Process looks like a party game that went wrong. A game for rich young people. But its impact upon those involved was considerable, and many who decided to take the preliminary 'Communications' course clearly believed that they would be helped with their personal difficulties. It is possible that this communal course may have been helpful in giving some participants greater social competence.

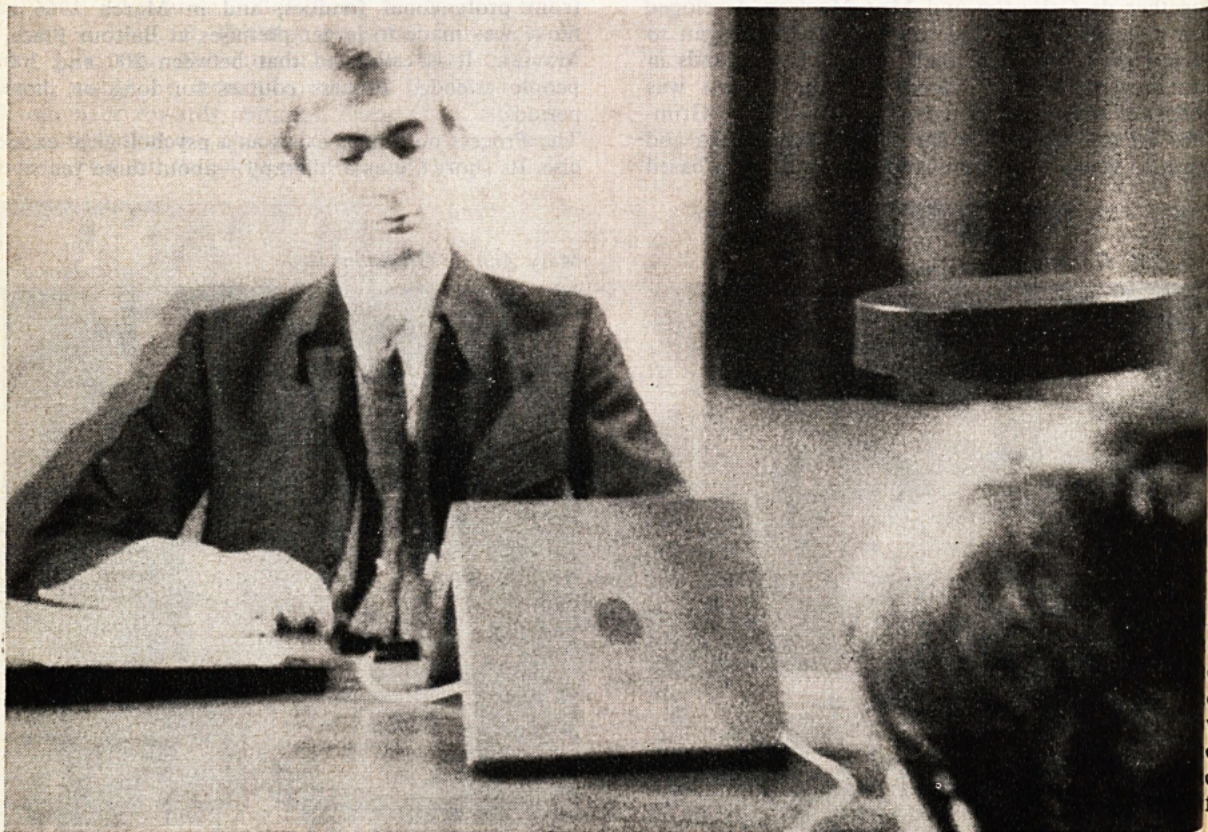
But for many, these communal courses were only the mild first stage in a series of intensely disturbing emotional experiences. The strength of the Process lay in the vulnerability of its adherents, almost all young and many at crisis points in their lives. They needed help and the Process, they believed, would provide it. Their first impressions were favourable, and the communal courses were even enjoyable. Most of them appear to have liked the two de Grimstons

well enough, and to have enjoyed these social evenings with people of their own age and class. The idea that the Process could help them remained their strongest link with it and many were convinced enough to pay substantial sums to the organisation for the communal and individual courses.

Under the individual treatment the client submitted to high pressure probing and questioning, often for long periods, by a 'therapist', who would be either one of the de Grimstons or someone trained by them in Process techniques. Client and therapist would sit opposite one another at a table, the therapist asking a series of questions based on a well-devised plan, the 'patient' answering. In many cases these long, costly and exhausting sessions had the effect of tying 'patients' more closely with the Process. Their interest began to focus more and more upon their 'treatment' and the de Grimstons, less and less upon the outside world, their friends outside, their parents.

The Process seems to have relied greatly upon the power to win the love and loyalty of people by an appeal to their highest ideals. Many of those who joined believed that the Process would make them better people or help them to deal more effectively

In the Process individual sessions the 'therapist' and 'patient' sat opposite one another. The instrument on the table is an electrometer.



with problems. It seems clear that the powerful hold that the de Grimstons and their group had upon their 'patients' was manifold, a combination of love and fear, but ultimately what held many of them was the promise of a desirable state which, they believed, only the Process could bring about. It had become almost a religion.

The young people's deep involvement in the group, and the changes that this brought about in their behaviour, caused widespread uneasiness among parents, relations and friends. Several parents strongly opposed their children continuing with the Process and the parents of one young man applied to have him made a ward of court.

It is evident from personal accounts that many feel that they have been through exciting but painful and in some cases frightening experiences. They want to forget about it. Many believe that the public should be protected against such experiences. Some believe there should be an act that prohibits any kind of treatment by people without some recognised qualification for this kind of work.

A consultant psychiatrist, who was treating a schizophrenic who had attended a Scientology course, was doubtful whether such semi-psychological cults as Scientology or the Process had been proved to be harmful. They appealed to artistic people, students from Oxford or Cambridge, but you would never find a science student from Imperial College joining. He said that the attitude of many who joined would be that any hypothesis that had not been disproven was worth a try.

Another psychiatrist paralleled the various stages through which the Process passed with the natural history of a schizoid progression. There was the growing self-centredness of the group, the omnipotence of its thinking (a characteristic schizoid feature), poverty of ideation and more and more nebulous concepts. Latterly there was the quasi-religious element and the decisions to abandon the world completely and become an isolated community in the wilds of Mexico.

Five months with the Process

Like many Processees, the writer of this article was drawn into the organisation by a personal friend who had undergone the 'treatment'. Suspicious at first, she was given a warm welcome and felt disposed to think the course genuinely helpful. In this article she describes the subsequent events that led her into greater and greater involvement and then to her ultimate break with the group.

Looking back on five months which now seem like a childhood nightmare I am at a complete loss to work out how I got involved in the Process in the first place, and how it made me so strangely unaware of the goings on of the world outside. The gradual encroachment of the organisation on my individuality, and how I lost all ability to make any detached and reasoned judgment, when generally considered to be a reasonably normal, balanced and intelligent person, remains a mystery. Trying to think back and piece the whole story together, it has seemed to me that the only satisfactory way in which I can get across any of the atmosphere of that strange flat in Wigmore Street—the predecessor of the luxurious Park Lane set-up—is to run through events in a roughly chronological order.

It is bound to be an unsatisfactory account; I have forgotten a lot, aided by an extraordinary, if rather overdeveloped gift for blocking unpleasant things out of my mind, which was, I am sure, the thing that enabled me to recover from the whole experience with remarkable speed. And of course, to quote the organisation's own dictum, the Process is constantly changing. The Process that I knew was very different from the Process that set off in search of paradise in

Nassau, and that also different from the Process which is now in Mayfair once more as I write.

My first encounter with the organisation was in October, 1965. It then called itself Compulsions Analysis (constantly being mis-spelt by journalistic critics as Compulsive Analysis—a Freudian slip in which its authors must subsequently have taken great pride as it proved to be an accurate prophecy). A boy friend, to whom I shortly afterwards became engaged, had decided to become one of their 'therapists' after receiving 'treatment' which, there is no denying, had, in the short term, at least, done him an enormous amount of good. My first reaction when I heard of it had been one of healthy suspicion—all right for you chum, but not my line at all.

When persuaded to go to one of the evening communications courses in the interests of our continuing good relationship I was filled with stark terror. My fears seemed hardly justified, for I received a very warm welcome which might perhaps have been somewhat stylised, but there was no doubt of its good faith. The evening was spent in a form of group therapy which appeared to be quite constructive. I was hailed by Mary Ann de Grimston and members of the group as a wonderfully warm and relaxed person

(I suppose I might be described as fairly amicable with most of my fellow men, but no-one who has talked to me for more than five minutes could ever describe me as relaxed). However this flood of compliments made me feel kindly disposed towards the whole outfit, and I was most impressed with the way in which the people—14 or 15 in number—in that room were tackling their own and each others' problems with a genuine wish to help. I was also struck by their practical application of a principle which amounted to considering one's own shortcomings before blaming or disliking other people.

I attended a number of these evenings—producing, as everyone new did from time to time, what I regarded as constructive criticisms of the way things were run and some of the ideas. With the benefit of hindsight I can see that the way in which these were dealt with should have flashed the red light. Mary Ann or Bob de Grimston usually answered with a 'That's *your* reality', or something to the effect that these were only things that could be fully understood by the initiated—those who had undergone the individual 'therapy'. As time wore on towards Christmas the answer was that each one of us recognised

deep inside himself that the Process was the only ultimate good. But because man was full of evil and the guilt of hundreds of generations since his original rejection of God in the Garden of Eden, he would automatically try to reject this good. Thus one's internal serpent was fighting to get one away from the road of truth. There are few answers to this theory drummed into your head by twelve people at once, all with one idea only in their heads—that of *helping* you. Before my final departure I had some fairly splendid battles—but one was inevitably on the losing side.

Anyway, by the end of November I became fully initiated into the mystic rite of sessions. I had been putting it off for as long as possible, afflicted once more with the stark terror that I put down to my own arrant cowardice, but the course of true love once more won the day and I took a week off work to do a crash-course—six hours a day of sitting, half lying, in a rather comfortable garden chair, the sort that adorns the most chic of patios.

Looking back on it I imagine I was probably too tired to be taking very much active part anyway—if I wasn't at the beginning, two or three days of that sort of treatment certainly made me so. How-

'I was most impressed with the way in which the people were tackling their own and each others' problems with a genuine wish to help.' The Process Communications course in session



ever, repetitively dragging out my fears, hopes, beliefs, and realities in answer to monotonous questioning seemed not altogether unpleasant. I wrote everything I found down in a blue exercise book, as was the custom, and as soon as I emerged the whole lot became the public property of the group downstairs. I roared through my 'case' at record speed, in the midst of general acclaim.

However it was during this week that an unexpected event occurred that achieved my final involvement. I emerged from my six hours one afternoon to find the place full of press reporters, who were in their turn full of criticism. I talked to them, fearing that failure to do so would brand me as an infidel, and I became the leading feature of their full-page article the next week. I was at last 'committed'—there was general rejoicing all round among the faithful, and having stuck my neck out this far, to the horror of all my friends and relations, I had to stick to my guns. The guns in this case were television, and we all made a film which the BBC showed, together with some fairly cynical editorial comment.

I began to lose myself totally and have absolutely no awareness of the people I knew and liked in the world outside. Interest in any other event, in anything not involving the immediate group, faded. I joined energetically in the campaign mounted to save the world in the middle of the winter—typed documents propounding Process doctrine which I never saw completed, helped to organise meetings in Oxford and stood by at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park while the innermost ring of apostles harangued the rather chilly masses. 'We are man's only way back to God, but man rejects us'. The reasons given for the enormous hostility to the organisation shown by those who had either never experienced it, or had left it, was their guilt at once more rejecting God.

By January, 1966, I was classed as thoroughly wicked by the powers that be. I was informed that I was making subtle attempts to draw others away from the Process. I was also sticking to my promise made six months earlier of going to the country to look after things while my parents were abroad for two months—and to leave Wigmore Street for more than 24 hours was the unforgivable betrayal. Madly I had more and more sessions to try and get over these problems, particularly because of this terrible wicked-

ness which had been mine for so many generations (the Process then believed in reincarnation; I don't know whether it does now), and because everything was still subtly coated in the warmth and generosity with which my original appearance on the scene had been greeted.

These sessions failed to achieve anything. I went off to the country and found to my shame that I still rather enjoyed civilised conversation and the warm friendly secure atmosphere of my own home and family. I came up to London from time to time for a day or two and a session or two—tremendous arguments ensuing every time because I found that I could not make myself believe that the end of the world was at hand, which was by then a 'must'. Even if I had succeeded in doing so by the dint of the hundreds of sessions that were the recommended cure, I was not at all sure that the right way to prepare oneself for it was to live in total isolation examining one's soul in Mayfair. On the whole I was in favour of something a little more effective in helping others (even if they were damned) which I had felt originally that the Process would do.

I was lucky. The fact that I had a perfectly made opportunity to detach myself enabled me to start using my senses again. The fact that I had escaped selling my soul, and that I therefore felt in some strange way indestructible, boosted me through the rather hard first few weeks after I left. And I had marvellous friends, one or two who had been through the experience themselves, and others who had remained completely loyal to me throughout, however much I had rebuffed and ignored them. I found I recovered and started to lead a normal life again very quickly, regarding the whole thing as a disastrous but perhaps a salutary experience. I found that I had to start again in learning to accept myself and my surroundings, for while the Process set out to achieve these things for those who joined it, its effect for me was just the opposite.

This is not obviously a comprehensive account at all, nor could it be. I have omitted all the actual details of what I 'found' in my sessions—these are of personal interest only, and hard to explain to anyone not familiar with the internal operations of the organisation.